

Information for Municipal Offices

Avian influenza, an epizootic disease

As early as January 2004, the World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed the occurrence of influenza viruses capable of affecting the health of animals and as a consequence of human beings. Here we are dealing with a type of avian influenza that is also commonly known as "bird flu". Originally this virus appeared mainly in the Asian part of the world with only a few isolated cases reported in Europe and, recently, in Austria as well. Avian influenza occurs in chickens, turkeys and amongst numerous free-range bird species and can, firstly and foremost, cause considerable economic damage.

Please note: At the present time it is currently a worldwide veterinary problem, namely, an animal epidemic called avian influenza ("bird flu"). The risk for human beings lies primarily in the possible mutation of the virus. Whether and when such a mutation happens cannot be predicted by anyone at the present stage.

After the death of several wild birds in Austria from avian influenza in mid-February, the Federal Minister of Health and Women has ordered a number of measures to prevent the transmission of avian influenza to domestic fowl in Austria.

Please note: The cases of avian influenza, which have appeared in Austria up until now, have exclusively been found in wild birds. So far no domestic fowl have been affected in Austria.

The following regulations currently apply in Austria:

1. Notification of poultry husbandry

All keepers of poultry and other birds must notify the responsible district administrative authority that they are engaged in poultry husbandry. The form to be used for this purpose can be downloaded from www.ovis.at, completed and returned to the respective district administrative authority. **The data to be provided includes**

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the name and address of the animal keeper, if applicable the LFBIS number ((identification code of Austrian holdings), and the type of birds kept as well as their number at the time of notification.

Notifications must be made for any animal keeping (starting with 1 animal); this also applies to zoos, animal shelters, hobby husbandry, small-scale operations, and animal keeping for hunting purposes. the keeping of ornamental birds that are held in permanent captivity in closed rooms and without direct or indirect contact to other birds as well as operations which have already been registered, i.e. through the "Mehrfachantrag Flächen" or "multiple area application" (animal lists; registration with AgrarMarkt Austria), poultry keeping (notification with Statistics Austria), through registration in compliance with the Poultry Hygiene Ordinance or the Ordinance regarding Marketing Standards for Eggs (official laying hen register) and members of the Austrian Poultry Health Service.

2. Regulations regarding poultry husbandry:

- **Obligation to keep poultry in sheds and closed pens:** All pet birds – also those of hobby bird keepers – must be kept in sheds with immediate effect. Keepers who do not have a shed, must install closed pens that prevent any contact to wildfowl and their faeces..

In justified cases, a public health officer may make an exception, e.g. for ostrich farms to prevent animal cruelty. In such a case, however, various examinations must be conducted at the keeper's expense.

- **Separating ducks and geese from other fowl**

Ducks and geese are waterfowl and as such run a particular risk of bird flue infection. For this reason, these birds should be separated from other fowl.

3. Ban on animal exhibitions and other events

For the time being, events during which fowl or other bird species are exhibited, exchanged, traded or presented are prohibited. Every event at which birds from different holdings are brought together to one place brings with it the risk of disease propagation. Monitored events approved by a public health officer are excluded from this rule.

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4. Ban on hunting free-range birds

5. Stricter criteria for compulsory notification in the event of suspected epidemics

Pursuant to the Epizootic Diseases Act and Avian Flue Ordinance, notification of bird flue cases is compulsory. **The public health officer of the responsible district administrative authority must be notified immediately of any suspected avian flue cases.** The public health officer will take samples from the bird stock and send these to the National Reference Laboratory, the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES), Institute for Veterinary Diseases Control in Baden for analysis. Notification in cases of suspected epizootic disease in a poultry farm is compulsory if the animals exhibit the following symptoms:

- **sudden death of a large number of animals (more than 3% per week)**
- **dramatic decrease in egg production (5% reduction for at least two days)**
- **sudden decrease of water and fodder intake by more than 20%**
- **respiratory signs and symptoms**
- **oedema or bleeding in head, neck, crest or legs**

Compulsory notification does not only apply for agricultural holdings, but also for small-scale and hobby keepers!

6. Compulsory notification of waterfowl deaths

Anyone who finds dead waterfowl must notify the public health officer at the district administrative authority immediately.

Special measures for protection and surveillance zones:

Apart from the above-mentioned rules applicable across Austria, protection and surveillance zones were installed in the specific areas surrounding the place at which an infection of infected free-range birds was determined. Additional special measures must be taken here:

Protection zones are the areas within a 3 kilometre radius of the place at which an infection was determined. The following additional provisions apply here:

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1. All poultry keeping operations must be inspected by the district administrative authority. In addition, the poultry must be subjected to clinical examination and, if necessary, samples must be taken for lab analysis. Records must be kept for all these checks and their results.
2. Adequate disinfection measures must be taken at all access roads and paths to poultry keeping operations. Cleaning and disinfection of all means of transport, loading sites and equipment must be ensured with the utmost care.
3. Poultry and other birds held in captivity may not be transported by public means of transport or privately within the zone. This ban does not apply to transit through the protection zone via long-haul routes and railway lines.
4. Poultry and other birds held in captivity, fresh meat, ground meat, meat preparations, and meat products derived from poultry and other birds held in captivity or free-range game birds, eggs or objects which may be carriers of infective agents may only be transported from the poultry keeping operation upon approval from the district administrative authority and if the following requirements have been fulfilled:
 - a) Poultry for immediate slaughtering may only be transported to a slaughterhouse located in the protection or surveillance zone; if this is not an option, the poultry may be transported only to a slaughterhouse determined by the Provincial Governor.
 - b) Day-old chicks or poultry for breeding purposes may only be transported to an operation within the protection or surveillance zone that has no other poultry on its premises.
 - c) Brooding eggs may only be transported to a brooding operation within the protection or surveillance zone or to a brooding operation outside this zone determined by the Provincial Governor. Prior to transport, the eggs and their packaging must be disinfected.
5. Transport pursuant to the 4 provisions below must be direct and under supervision of the authorities. These transports may only be approved after the supplying operation has been subject to veterinary inspection by the district administrative authority. The means of transport used must be cleaned and disinfected prior and after use.
6. Lorries and other vehicles used for transport purposes in the protection zone pursuant to point 4 above may only leave the protection zone after inspection by the authorities and only upon approval by the district administrative authority.
7. The transport and distribution of solid and liquid manure is prohibited. This prohibition does not apply to transports for further processing.

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Surveillance zones is the area within a 10 radius of the place at which an infection was determined. In contrast to protection zones, the following criteria apply:

1. Cleaning and disinfection of all means of transport, loading sites and equipment must be ensured with the utmost care.
2. Live poultry, poultry carcasses and eggs as well as any carriers of agents may only be transported from the operation after inspection by the authorities and upon approval from the district administrative authority.
3. Poultry may not be removed from the surveillance zone for a specified period of time; unless the birds are forwarded directly to a slaughterhouse outside the surveillance zone determined by the Provincial Governor.
4. Brooding eggs may not be removed from the surveillance zone, unless they are forwarded directly to a brooding operation outside the surveillance zone determined by the district administrative authority. Prior to transport, the eggs and their packaging must be disinfected.
5. The transport and distribution of solid and liquid manure is prohibited. This prohibition does not apply to transports for further processing
6. The owners or keepers of domestic fowl must keep records of all transports of poultry and eggs and of all in-coming and out-going animals or products.
7. Persons who transport poultry or eggs or trade with these must keep records of all animal and product transports.
8. The records kept in compliance with items 6 and 7 must be kept for at least one year and presented to the authorities upon request.

Please note: A current list of the affected areas is available at www.bmgf.gv.at.

If "bird flu" is detected in domestic poultry stocks in spite of all these precautionary measures, additional regulations set forth in the Crisis Plan devised for such situations become effective. These include, among others, the installation of crisis centres, the shut-down of infected holdings, the killing of affected fowl (for more details, please see "Crisis Plan for Avian Influence and Newcastle Disease" at www.bmgf.gv.at).

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Background information: Importance and protection of humans

In principle, the “bird flue” is only transmitted from animal to animal. Communication of the disease from animals to human beings is basically possible, but only occurs rarely and if there is very close contact between animals and humans (as in Asia, where humans and animals live at close quarters). There is no evidence to date of any direct virus transmission from an infected human to another human. At some stage, the influenza virus infiltrates all of the animal’s organs and is eliminated via mucus and the faeces, with the faeces containing particularly large amounts of the virus. Transmission to humans is presumably through contact with poultry and their excrements in combination with poor hand hygiene or the inhalation of dust particles containing the virus. Persons coming into contact with diseased animals should therefore wear protective masks and observe general hygiene standards.

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For further information, please dial **050 555 666** to contact the **Info-Hotline** of the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES).

Legal Notice:

Please note that this paper is in no way exhaustive and we assume no liability for its contents.

Further information is available at www.ages.at and www.bmgf.gv.at. These websites also provide downloadable information on the Austrian Pandemic Plan and the “Crisis Plan for Classical Avian Flu and Newcastle Disease 2000”.